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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002141

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA  
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2018

TAGS: [NI](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR-FIRST LADY DISCUSS YAR'ADUA'S  
HEALTH, DENIES LUNG CANCER, BUT ADDS ASTHMA TO THE MIX

REF: A. ABUJA 2104  
[1](#)B. ABUJA 2119  
[1](#)C. ABUJA 2123

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders Reason 1.4 (B & D)

[1](#)1. (C) In an effort to achieve two objectives: finding out more about the state of Nigerian President Yar'Adua's health, and informing the Villa that they could call on and trust the Ambassador, if needed, regarding this situation, she met with the First Lady Alhaji Turai Yar'Adua one-on-one on October

[1](#)27. Ambassador began the short courtesy call by noting the First Lady's good work in the health field ranging from her activism on HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as her work with pregnant women, the prison population, and children's educational issues. She then turned to the point of the visit, underscoring USG concerns about the state of President Yar'Adua's health and that the purpose of meeting with the First Lady was in the spirit of friendship not only to offer her good wishes to the President, but also to inform Mrs. Yar'Adua that, if needed, the Ambassador could be called and trusted on this issue. The Ambassador then added that she, as well as many others in the international community, are hearing that the President is also now suffering from lung cancer in addition to his kidney disease, and she therefore wanted the First Lady to be aware of the high quality and range of medical facilities in the United States which might be helpful.

[1](#)2. (C) For her part, the First Lady was very warm and friendly -- as she has always been with the Ambassador in the past -- and said that she had been surprised at how much this rumor had gotten around. She blamed and put the rumor problems squarely on the shoulders of both "those in the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)," and what she called the "political opposition," (read the Action Congress (AC) and the ANPP or All Nigerian Peoples' Party) who were not "supportive of her husband's goals and objectives for the country and what he is trying to do to help Nigeria." The First Lady went on to give an additional example of what she called "the political oppositions'" tactics, by highlight how her trip to Houston in early 2008 was painted negatively in the press, claiming that she had used government resources to advance her personal interests on the trip. Turai explained to the Ambassador that she had not only paid for her ticket out of personal funds, but also financed all her expenses, but she noted, the press reported otherwise.

13. (C) Mrs. Yar'Adua then said she appreciated the Ambassador's concern and good wishes and knew and understood that her overture was done in the interest of friendship and consideration for her and her husband. Ambassador stressed that she did not wish to interfere in such a personal issue as the health of the President, but certainly wanted the First Lady to know that she can be called on to provide information, if needed, on various medical facilities in the United States and trusted on this issue, adding that the First Lady should "feel free to call on her at anytime." In addition she said that she "appreciated" that the First Lady understood and accepted the spirit by which the Ambassador would raise this issue.

14. (C) In order to ensure that the points were clear, the Ambassador then asked the First Lady again directly if the President had lung cancer; she said no. Mrs. Yar'Adua, who herself is small, appears soft spoken, quiet (although the reputation that the Mission hears about her is the exact opposite, including evoking fear in the Villa staff and Ministers), and has the similar involuntary cough as her husband's, said that of late the President's asthma had gotten worse. Therefore while they were performing the lesser Hajji, it was deemed important for this to be looked at by doctors in Saudi Arabia. Turai added that she and the President had laughed when they heard the reports of his cancer, but she noted her husband had always had kidney problems and has had to take medicine for this issue and travel to Germany to have regular checkups, noting that this was nothing new. Mrs. Yar'Adua then underscored in a

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nonchalant manner that in "our religion whatever happens in a person's life is god's will, including if it is your time to leave." Ambassador closed the meeting by saying that she was looking forward to seeing the President in the near future, but in the meantime would the First Lady send him her best regards. Turai noted she would pass on to the President the Ambassador's good wishes, that she wanted to see him, and that the U.S. remained a friend to Nigeria. The First Lady gave the Ambassador a hug on departure.

15. (C) Comment: Despite her small demeanor it has been reported by numerous Mission contacts that Mrs. Yar'Adua not only fiercely protects her husband, is also known as "Mrs. President behind her back," and evokes constant fear in the Villa and among Ministers. It is also reported that she likes expensive shopping sprees and has her hand in illicit enrichment activities, including in the oil sector. We have also heard that it is Turai that had pleaded with Yar'Adua on her knees recently not to step down because of illness just after their return from Saudi Arabia. Ambassador did not expect much information (truthful or otherwise) from the First Lady, but wanted to put a marker down as close to the President's ear as possible that we are watching the situation, and worried about his sustainability as well as "the what next" for Nigeria in light of his health.

Sanders